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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SARAJEVO 001177

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SUBJECT: BOSNIA - INSIDE THE MIND OF KOMSIC'S CHIEF OF STAFF

REF: A. SARAJEVO 863

[1](#)B. SARAJEVO 674

Classified By: DCM Judith Cefkin. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On July 6, Zeljko Komsic, the Croat member of Bosnia's Tri-Presidency, will take over the rotating chairmanship of the Presidency from the Serb member, Nebojsa Radmanovic. Radmanovic has, in our estimation, turned in a solid performance. Komsic's chairmanship comes at a particularly sensitive time given Bosnia's heated political environment and our expectation that the Presidency will take up several issues of crucial importance to our bilateral relationship, including issues associated with Bosnia's Iraq deployment. Our dealings with President Komsic and his staff to date raise questions in our mind about how effective Komsic might be as Presidency Chairman. Recent conversations with Komsic's Chief of Staff Amir Ibrovic, during which he outlined what he claimed was Komsic's political strategy, have done nothing to allay those concerns. END SUMMARY.

Radmanovic Turns in Positive Performance

[1](#)2. (C) The rotating chairmanship of the Bosnian Tri-Presidency will shift from Bosnian-Serb President Nebojsa Radmanovic to Bosnian-Croat President Zeljko Komsic on July [1](#)6. While the position carries few additional responsibilities, the Presidency Chairman plays an important role in setting the Presidency's agenda. Ideally, the Chairman should also play the role of consensus builder among his colleagues. While the political climate in Bosnia has steadily worsened since the 2006 elections, we have been largely pleased with Radmanovic's performance. Although he overreacted to Bosniak member of the Tri-Presidency Haris Silajdzic's attempts to confront Serbia over the February 26 International Court of Justice (ICJ) verdict (Ref A), Radmanovic has been instrumental in securing Presidency approval for several key items on our bilateral agenda, including extending the Bosnian military deployment to Iraq, arranging the Presidency visit to Iraq, and donating of surplus arms to the Afghan National Army. We have also found his staff to be competent and professional.

Komsic Prepares to Take Charge

[1](#)3. (C) We expect our engagement with the Presidency to be at

least as intense under Komsic's chairmanship as it was under Radmanovic's. There will be a continuing need to encourage the Presidency to play a constructive role in the myriad political crises plaguing Bosnia. We also anticipate dealing with Komsic on a range of important bilateral issues, such as possible change of mission scenarios for Bosnia's Iraq deployment, further implementation of defense reform, and insulating Bosnia from political fallout associated with the Kosovo final status process. Thus far, our dealings with Komsic and his staff do not suggest that they possess the political maturity or gravitas required to manage effectively these or other issues. His staff are politically inexperienced and several hold second jobs, which appear to take priority over their presidential responsibilities. They are also often unable or unwilling to engage in serious substantive discussions (Ref B). Our concerns have been reinforced by our exchanges with Radmanovic's and Silajdzic's aides, who complain to us regularly about the performance of Komsic's staff - one of the few matters on which they agree.

Amir Ibrovic - Komsic's "Strategist" and Chief of Staff

¶4. (C) Komsic's Chief of Staff, childhood friend, campaign manager, and owner of Sarajevo's popular "Tito Bar," controls Komsic's "cabinet." Komsic gave Ibrovic carte blanche to assemble his Presidency team, and Ibrovic freely admits he chose to hire close friends rather than experienced political operatives, most of whom do not have strong ties to Komsic's Social Democratic Party (SDP). In several exchanges with us, Ibrovic claimed that Komsic does not view himself as particularly indebted to SDP, one reason Ibrovic felt no obligation to staff his office from within the party. He

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also said that Komsic has often rebuffed requests by SDP Chairman Zlatko Lagumdzija to toe the party line. According to Ibrovic, Komsic wants to be seen as a unifying political figure capable of serving as President or Prime Minister of a post-Dayton Bosnian state. Ibrovic argued that this is possible if Komsic exploits his image as a "war hero" and presents himself as a decisive leader, who rises above the country's ethnic divisions a la Tito (Note: Komsic has cited Tito as a role model, and his office is decorated with a large portrait of Tito. End Note.)

¶5. (C) Ibrovic pointed to several recent events that were designed to demonstrate this, including Komsic's appearance at a military ceremony wearing his Golden Lilly decoration from the Bosniak Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina (ABiH) and his trip to Iraq with other members of the Presidency, during which he wore a specially-designed military uniform. Even before the Presidency returned from Iraq, the weekly newsmagazine Slobodna Bosna prominently featured Komsic's "Diary from Baghdad," that included an almost minute by minute summary of his travel along with numerous pictures of Komsic -- in uniform -- in Iraq. Ibrovic also sees Komsic repeated calls for a full investigation into allegations of war crimes in Bugojno in 1993 as crucial to establishing his cross-ethnic appeal, particularly among Croats, many of whom consider him a traitor for fighting with the ABiH rather than the Croat Defense Council (HVO) during the 1992-1995 war. The Bugojno case, which involves the disappearance of Bosnian-Croats from the town, has repeatedly ensnared Defense Minister Selmo Cikotic, who was serving as ABiH commander in the region at the time.

The World According to Komsic (According to Ibrovic)

¶6. (C) Ibrovic, echoing previous statements by Komsic to the Ambassador, told us that Komsic believes it would be foolish to openly challenge Silajdzic at this time. Political reality required Komsic enable rather than confront the Bosniak member of the Tri-Presidency, Ibrovic explained. Komsic's strategy was "to wait out" Silajdzic, who he

anticipated would inevitably overreach, which he was already perilously close to doing over Srebrenica. Ibrovic argued that feelings of moral and political culpability were behind Silajdzic's position on Srebrenica. Ibrovic claimed that Bosnian lawyers managing the ICJ case against Serbia had access to documents from the Yugoslav Defense Council, despite their public assertions to the contrary, but that the lawyers chose not to use them because the documents included references to discussions about territorial divisions between Belgrade and former Bosnia President Alija Izetbegovic and Silajdzic. (Comment: Accusations that the Bosniak leadership "sacrificed" Srebrenica to the Serbs surfaced immediately after the enclave's fall. Regardless of their truth, Silajdzic may feel some guilt for presiding over Srebrenica's fall - he was PM and FM at the time. Ibrovic's claims that Bosniak lawyers intentionally covered up documents that would have incriminated Silajdzic do not strike us as credible. End Comment.)

Radmanovic the Communist

17. (C) Ibrovic said that he and Komsic respected Radmanovic and see him as a partner on most issues. Ibrovic and Komsic believe he is angling to fill the RS leadership vacuum "after Dodik inevitably overreaches." (Comment: Silajdzic's staff have also claimed that Radmanovic's long-term political aim was to challenge Dodik. End Comment.) Ibrovic said that in his and his boss's assessment, Radmanovic was a "Communist, not a Serb." To illustrate this point, Ibrovic said that Radmanovic used the traditional Serb military greeting "God help you, heroes" during the ceremony for the Bosnian army's RS regiment, but afterwards personally apologized to Komsic. According to Ibrovic, Radmanovic said Dodik had "forced" him to use the greeting, but that he personally found it distasteful. Radmanovic's uncomfortable relationship with Serb nationalism would make it difficult for him to usurp Dodik's political position, Ibrovic asserted.

Comment

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18. (C) Ibrovic believes he has created a "brilliant" political strategy for positioning Komsic as Bosnia's savior once the current storm of ethnic politics runs its course. Ibrovic is a mercurial character given to theatrical, angry outbursts and widely rumored to be an alcoholic, so we take some of his claims with a grain of salt. Nonetheless, Radmanovic's and Silajdzic's staff confirm that Ibrovic is the only advisor to whom Komsic really listens. In this context, Ibrovic's perceptions may matter more than political reality, and it certainly is true that Komsic used the Presidency's Iraq trip for some political showboating. In any case, Komsic's performance to date has not fulfilled the high hopes we and many others had for him in the wake of the October 2006 general elections. It is difficult to imagine Komsic, in his current incarnation, as an effective chairman of the Presidency, which is likely to further complicate efforts to accomplish our objectives in Bosnia over the next 8 months.

MCELHANEY